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Special Consumer Survey Report

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center, The Conference Board.

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THE ISSUES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

AIDS, Drug Abuse, and the Cost of Medical Care, are considered by a majority of people to be the nation's most pressing ~~social~~ and economic problems. Also high on the list of concerns are the Federal Budget Deficit, the Plight of the Farmers, and Crime. Problems considered to be the least serious are Threat of Nuclear War, Smoking, Pornography, and White Collar Crime.

These are the principal findings of a recent Conference Board study. A survey covering a representative sample of 5,000 households was conducted for the Board by National Family Opinion, Inc. Survey participants were requested to assess the degree of seriousness with which they regarded a list of 18 economic and social issues. For each issue there were five response options ranging from "most serious" to "least serious."

An identical survey was conducted a year and a half ago and there have been some fairly large changes of opinion on a number of the issues. AIDS moved up from ninth place on the list of problems to the top in the most recent study. Drug Abuse, and the Cost of Medical Care were regarded with about the same degree of seriousness in both surveys. The Plight of the Farmers, which ranked roughly in the middle of the list of issues in the earlier probe, has now moved up to fifth place, evidently because of the drought. Unemployment, which ranked high a year and a half ago, is now regarded with considerably less concern, reflecting the marked improvement in the jobless rate. The degrees of concern with Poverty, and the Homeless remained near the middle of the list. The Threat of Nuclear War is still at the very bottom of the list.

THE DEGREES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

Here are a number of economic and social issues which are causing many people concern. How would you rate the seriousness of each one of these issues as compared to the others?

	Survey Conducted July 1988					Degree of Concern*	
	Most Serious				Least Serious	July '88	Jan. '87
AIDS	61.7%	21.0%	11.3%	3.8%	2.2%	84.1	75.3
Drug Abuse	57.4	27.3	10.9	3.1	1.3	84.1	83.2
Cost of Medical Care	51.6	31.1	14.4	2.4	0.5	82.7	81.8
Federal Budget Deficit	46.6	31.2	17.8	3.6	0.8	79.8	80.2
Plight of Farmers	45.7	30.4	17.2	5.1	1.6	78.4	75.8
Crime	39.3	35.9	20.9	3.1	0.8	77.5	77.9
Poverty	37.9	29.1	23.1	7.7	2.2	73.2	74.4
The Homeless	38.6	28.7	21.8	7.9	3.0	73.0	73.7
Alcoholism	35.7	30.7	22.7	7.6	3.3	72.0	76.2
Foreign Trade Deficit	28.9	38.8	24.8	6.2	1.3	72.0	73.8
Pollution	31.7	33.6	25.0	7.5	2.2	71.3	66.7
Loss of Jobs in Mfg.	31.5	33.2	24.9	8.9	1.5	71.1	77.0
Unemployment	33.9	29.9	25.0	8.7	2.5	71.0	78.9
Cost of Housing	26.7	32.8	29.5	8.6	2.4	68.2	65.7
White Collar Crime	19.5	32.5	32.2	11.5	4.3	62.9	64.5
Pornography	29.9	22.7	22.9	13.1	11.4	61.7	60.2
Smoking	22.5	22.9	27.0	14.6	13.0	56.8	61.3
Threat of Nuclear War	15.9	19.7	27.6	23.1	13.7	50.3	56.9

*The 'Degree of Concern' is computed by giving 'Most Serious' (first column) a weight of 1.00, the second column a weight of 0.75, the third of 0.50, the fourth a weight of 0.25, and the fifth column (Least Serious) a weight of 0. These products, added together, denote the 'Degree of Concern.' This measure can range from 0 to 100.

The figures shown are based on two identical surveys, the most recent conducted in July 1988, the other in January 1987.

Survey conducted for The Conference Board by NFO Research, Inc.

There are some differences in responses by age. Older people consider almost all of the issues as more serious than do younger people. However, young and old have many similar priorities. Both indicate high levels of concern with AIDS, Drug Abuse, and Cost of Medical Care. Older people, as compared with the young, give a higher priority to the Federal Budget Deficit. They also express more than average concern with Pornography, White Collar Crime, and Alcoholism.

Opinion as to what constitutes the most pressing issues for the nation differs by income, but by less than what might be expected. Drugs, AIDS, the Cost of Medical Care, are high on the list of concerns of both the well-off and the not-so-well-off. However, the affluent give a higher priority to the Federal Budget Deficit, while Unemployment is of greater concern to those with less earnings. In general, the upper brackets consider almost all of the issues with a somewhat lower degree of concern than those with modest incomes.

There were also some differences in opinion by geographical region. Pollution is considered to be a more serious issue in New England and the Middle Atlantic states than in the rest of the nation. Unemployment is of above-average concern in the East South Central and West South Central states, as well as in the Mountain region. However, in New England most particularly, but also in the South Atlantic and Pacific regions, the jobless problem was considered less pressing than in most other areas. The Cost of Housing is regarded to be more serious by those in the New England, Middle Atlantic and Pacific regions than elsewhere. New Englanders expressed the highest level of concern about the Homeless.

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THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ISSUES BY REGION

	Total U.S.	*New England*	*Mid Atlantic*	*E.N. Central*	*W.N. Central*	*South Atlantic*	*E.S. Central*	*W.S. Central*	*Mountain*	*Pacific*
	Degree of Concern*									
AIDS	84.1	85.4	87.7	84.3	83.9	83.1	84.3	81.7	81.6	83.2
Drug Abuse	84.1	84.4	85.5	82.2	84.6	85.8	87.1	84.1	79.9	83.1
Cost of Medical Care	82.7	83.9	83.9	82.5	78.6	83.5	86.0	81.0	79.5	83.6
Federal Budget Deficit	79.8	80.6	78.1	79.5	82.2	81.0	78.8	80.2	82.0	78.2
Plight of Farmers	78.4	80.3	79.5	83.2	74.6	76.9	82.8	76.2	77.2	74.9
Crime	77.5	74.1	76.6	76.2	74.9	79.0	78.4	80.5	74.0	79.4
Poverty	73.2	74.8	75.3	75.1	71.6	71.0	75.0	72.2	72.9	71.8
The Homeless	73.0	77.0	75.4	73.4	70.4	72.2	73.0	70.8	70.2	73.5
Alcoholism	72.0	71.0	71.6	71.5	71.8	73.4	78.7	72.6	69.5	70.0
Foreign Trade Deficit	72.0	71.2	72.0	72.1	73.8	72.6	71.7	72.0	72.6	70.4
Pollution	71.2	77.6	75.3	70.6	65.9	72.8	67.4	65.7	68.6	72.9
Loss of Jobs in Mfg.	71.1	66.1	72.9	73.5	71.7	68.9	77.1	73.4	70.9	66.3
Unemployment	71.0	54.5	70.0	73.7	71.3	67.3	79.0	79.9	76.2	67.5
Cost of Housing	68.2	75.7	72.5	65.8	61.8	70.1	58.6	62.3	63.1	70.7
White Collar Crime	62.8	62.5	60.4	61.4	62.7	64.8	66.5	65.6	62.9	61.7
Pornography	61.6	58.9	60.9	60.3	64.0	63.4	70.5	64.5	60.6	57.2
Smoking	56.9	55.8	58.9	56.3	56.1	58.5	64.0	57.0	52.9	53.4
Threat of Nuclear War	50.3	53.3	53.1	50.6	50.4	51.3	49.6	46.2	50.2	48.0

*For definition, see first table.